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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 1992, Mesa Community College (MCC), in Phoenix, Arizona, established the Center for Public Policy and Service to promote community service and active participation in the social and political process as integral parts of a community college education. Through the Center, students are provided with educational opportunities in community service through service learning internships and in-course options in government agencies, educational entities, civic organizations, and citizen advocacy groups. MCC offers independent modules in 22 discipline areas, and the courses transfer as elective credit to the major universities in Arizona. Students may take between one and three credits each semester under the supervision of a faculty member within the discipline. Students receive a letter grade based on meetings with a faculty advisor, 50 volunteer contact hours per credit hour, an analytical paper, a reflective journal, and three reflective feedback sessions. Students are asked to evaluate what they have learned in terms of how they were influenced to take an advocacy role, how their values and opinions changed, and how they envision new solutions to problems. Approximately 45 students enroll in the program each semester, participating at over 140 community sites which are categorized by their relevance to specific discipline areas. Additionally, the center coordinates a citizen's action group, a community roundtable, and efforts to prevent gang activity. (MAB)

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community Colleges(75th, Minneapolis, MN, April 22-24, 1994)

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American Association of Community Colleges
75th Annual Convention
April 22-25

Yesterday It Was Called Civics; Today It Is Service Learning

Dr. Larry K. Christiansen
Mesa Community College, Mesa, Arizona

Good afternoon.

I am pleased to be here and delighted to have the opportunity to talk about Community Philanthropy. It is certainly a subject that fits well into this year's convention theme: "New Thinking for a New Century " ... for that is exactly what is happening in this arena. There is new thinking in education about the realm of community service and volunteerism. In fact, there is a whole new paradigm.

Last fall, President Clinton challenged educators to help renew a service and volunteer ethic in America. Because we are community colleges -- because our name -- as well as our mission -- reflect a long-term commitment to community involvement -- we are in an excellent position to take a leadership role in shaping this national agenda. I believe community colleges are up to the challenge. I believe we can -- and for that matter must -- foster a new sense of activism and well being in our communities.

The question is: How do we go about doing this?

Gone are the days when we simply say to our students: go out and do good. Put in a few hours every week at your local hospital ... at your elementary school ... at your community center... and then return the next week and do the same. This scenario isn't good enough any more.

Today, we must encourage our students to go beyond "putting in hours" . Yes, it is important to go out and do good. But, equally important, you must come back and reflect on what you've experienced and then seek ways to make the situation better. This is the new way of thinking. This is what we, as educators, call service learning.

Before, I talk more about service learning – and what we are doing at Mesa Community College in this arena – I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about community philantrophy as it relates to our college campuses. The reality is we cannot encourage, challenge and instill in our students a spirit and desire for community activism if our institutions have not established a campus culture that reflects this philosophy. In other words, we must build a strong sense of community on campus first.

How do we do this?

1. We must know the heartbeat of our community: what are the values – as well as the concerns – of the citizens who live and work in the community?

2. We must built a strong connectedness with our community. It is one thing to recognize community values – it is another to participate in – and be a part of -- the solutions to bettering the quality of life. If we're not connected to our

communities, we cannot possibly know our community's needs. And therefore, we cannot possibly be a part of fulfilling them.

3. To be connected, we must create strong ties with other educational entities in our communities in order to establish a cohesive and collaborative educational system that is good for students at all levels of their education.

4. We must partner with business and industry in order to understand their workforce needs so that our students will have the right skills and be well prepared to become the future workers and leaders in our communities.

5. We must link with community leaders so that education has a strong voice in shaping the policies and directions of our communities. Education is -- and will continue to be -- a vital component in the economic development of communities across our country.

6. We must encourage our staff, administrators, faculty and management to stretch beyond campus boundaries and participate in civic and professional organizations ... to support theatre, the fine arts, sports and recreation that add enormously to the make-up and character of our community.

7. And, lastly, -- and perhaps of greatest importance -- we must promote and nurture a teaching and learning environment that encourages our students to want to be involved in -- and to give back to -- the communities they live and work in. And they must be able to do so in a way that challenges them to reflect, think and come up with new and better solutions to the problems their communities face. They are our future.

Benjamin Franklin once said: "Tell me, and I forget. Teach me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I learn."

This is service learning.

When community service is integrated into academic coursework -- which is the very nature of service learning, it is valuable for two important and interrelated reasons: 1) service in the form of practical experience enhances learning in a wide variety of academic disciplines; and 2) the experience of community service embraces and becomes an extension of the inherent values of good citizenship and serving others.

Claire Gaudiani, president of Connecticut College, says, "Service connects thought and feeling in a deliberate way, creating a context in which students can explore how they feel about what they are thinking, and what they think about how they feel."

In the fall of 1992, we established a Center for Public Policy and Service at Mesa Community College. Before examining how the Center operates, I'd like to give you a little background on MCC and our community for the purpose of perspective.

MCC is the largest of 10 community colleges in the Maricopa Community College District which serves the entire Phoenix Metropolitan area. Our enrollment is approximately 20,000 students each semester. Our average student is 30 years old; and works 20 to 40 hours a week.

Mesa Community College is located in the City of Mesa which is in the East Valley of Metropolitan Phoenix. Mesa's population is approximately 340,000. The area is experiencing continued growth and is currently listed as the 52nd city in the country in terms of rapid growth.

Vincent Tinto, a professor of education and sociology at Syracuse University, recently said at the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges that "while we lecture about citizenship, we do little to promote teaching and learning environments that themselves could develop in students the norms and dispositions of citizenship."

I believe our Center for Public Policy and Service is doing just that. We established the Center for Public Policy and Service for the purpose of promoting community service and active participation in the social and political process as integral parts of a community college education. Philosophically, service-learning builds communities. By integrating community service with classroom curricula in a wide variety of disciplines, the Center develops and strengthens the concept of community action and positive advocacy.

Through the Center, our students are provided with educational opportunities in community service through service learning internships and in-course options in government agencies, educational entities, civic organizations and citizen advocacy groups. This is why I stressed earlier the importance of creating a philanthropic culture across the college campus. Strong ties to the community result in relationships that support and welcome service learning opportunities for students and in turn help fulfill the needs of community agencies and organizations.

These internships instill in students the importance of community involvement and civic responsibility in addition to linking a real world experience to classroom instruction. During the 1993-94 academic year -- which was only the second year for the Center's programs -- 74 students were involved in service learning activities. I think this is a strong indicator that students not only want to be involved -- they are ready!

We currently offer independent modules in 22 different discipline areas. These courses transfer as elective credit to the major universities in our state. Students can take between one and three credits each semester under the supervision of a faculty member within the discipline.

Students receive a letter grade — A - F. Grades are based on the fulfillment of five core requirements: meetings with a faculty advisor; 50 volunteer contact hours per credit hour; an analytical paper; a reflective journal; and three reflective feedback sessions. Because of time limitations, I am not going to go into more detail. However, the one thing that I do want to emphasize is the importance of the reflective component of service learning. Students are asked to evaluate what they've learned; has it spurred them to consider taking an advocacy role; has it changed their values and opinions; can they envision new solutions to problems. This is the challenge I mentioned earlier -- to go beyond putting in hours to helping rethink and reshape the issues facing today's communities.

Currently, approximately 45 students are enrolled in our program each semester. We have over 140 community sites which are categorized by their relevance to specific discipline areas.

Another component of the Center is to promote and assist faculty in the integration of service-learning into existing classes. This is what we call our -in course options. We currently have 13 faculty offering service-learning as an option within their classes: Macroeconomics, World Politics, American Government, English, Spanish, Anthropology, Geography, Communication, Nutrition, Children's Literature and Sociology. The list is growing all the time.

The Director of the Center is a Sociology instructor. For two semesters she offered service-learning as an in-course option. Last semester, she took the plunge and made it a requirement. At the time, she said she wasn't sure if she'd experience a mass walkout the first night of class when she informed her students about the service-learning requirement. This semester, 11 students from her fall class volunteered to come to her first class to convince students of the value of the service-learning experience. This particular class is now listed in our college catalogue as structured around service-learning.

There are a number of other dimenisions of MCC's Center for Public Policy which I'd like to touch on briefly:

- the Center coordinates Action Mesa! -- a citizen's group which speaks directly to the famous quote by Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that the actions of a few people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." There are four very active groups: the Kid's Voting committee; the Performing Arts committee; the Transportation committee; and the Mesa Link committee which has put together a computer community bulletin board.

• The Center also coordinates the Community Roundtable which brings crucial and key players in Mesa to the table. The Roundtable is just over a year old and is already actively involved in key issues. The last session focused on transportation and was attended by two City Council members, the Vice Mayor and over 40 concerned citizens.

• The Center is also involved in a Mesa United Way program called "Building a Healthy Mesa"; and collaborated with other local entities on a grant proposal to the Corporation on National Service targeting prevention of gang activity in the downtown. Today, there are 20 AmeriCorps members among the various groups. The Center also was actively involved during recent national and state elections in the staging of local candidate forums.

That is our program in a nutshell.

As educators, we in the community college system, have both a challenge and an opportunity. As we move towards a new century, we can be a tremendous catalyst in restoring volunteerism and the spirit of political activism in our country. Teaching and learning is our mission. Service-learning is one way of achieving that mission.

Building College Philanthropy

- Know the heartbeat of your community
- Connect to your community through involvement and participation
- Create strong ties with other educational entities
- Partner with business and industry
- Become a voice in community policies and direction
- Encourage staff, administrators, faculty and management to participate beyond campus boundaries in civic and professional organizations, theatre, fine arts, sports, recreation, etc.
- Promote and nurture a teaching and learning environment that fosters student involvement and activisim